

ADE DAILY NEWS CLIPS

May 27, 2013

Ex-teacher accused of sex assault (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

A former Crossett High School agriculture teacher is facing sexual-assault charges after an Arkansas State Police investigation.

Amanda Leigh Reilly, 31, faces two counts of second-degree sexual assault and one count of solicitation of first-degree sexual assault, according to court documents from Prosecuting Attorney Thomas Deen's office in Monticello.

She will have her first appearance and be formally charged June 24 in Hamburg.

Crossett School Board President Glenn McIntyre said Thursday that the board accepted Reilly's resignation May 13 but declined to comment further.

A number for Reilly, who now lives in Greenbrier, could not be located. She had no attorney on file as of Thursday, according to the Ashley County circuit clerk's office.

An Arkansas State Police report dated April 22 said officials at Crossett High School were alerted by the parents of a 16-year-old male about "inappropriate" text messages between their son and Reilly "regarding hugging," and that they "were concerned for his safety."

When confronted about the allegations by Crossett School District Superintendent Tommy Tyler and Crossett High School Principal Alicia Brown, Reilly denied inappropriate conduct with the student, the state police report said.

On April 3, the student's mother told state police investigators that her son was noticeably upset, saying to his mother that Reilly "won't leave me alone with these text messages," the report said.

When the student's mother asked if he and his teacher had sex, "he started crying and told her that he hasn't had sex with her. He told her that he kissed [Reilly] one time, and that she had touched him in his private area," according to the report.

The student then told investigators that "sometime in February while at [Reilly's] house, she put her hand inside of his pants ... and he put his hand inside her shirt and touched her breast," the report said.

Further, the boy said that while at the teacher's house during spring break, "she touched his [groin] on the outside of his clothes and then asked him [if she could perform oral sex]. When he told her no, she got mad at him," according to the report.

Tyler declined comment on the situation Thursday, saying only that “it is in the hands of law enforcement right now. [Reilly] is no longer employed [by the district].

State Dollars Boosts School Construction (nwaonline.com)

Some Northwest Arkansas schools are getting ready to start construction or repair projects, knowing they will receive \$23.8 million in state aid in the coming months.

The Arkansas Division of Public School Academic Facilities and Transportation recently approved money for projects in Bentonville, Farmington, Greenland, Lincoln, Pea Ridge, Prairie Grove, Siloam Springs, Springdale and West Fork.

The state money is a portion of the cost of the projects, based on a district’s wealth index. The index is a calculation reflecting the value of one mill per student, said Charles Stein, director of the facilities division. The higher the index, the less that district receives in state money for a building project.

For instance, the \$1.9 million coming to the Farmington district to develop the first phase of a new high school represents about 57 percent of the cost. Farmington’s index is 0.43, meaning it is responsible for 43 percent of the cost of a project. In comparison, Fayetteville has an index of 0.99.

The commission allocated \$130.6 million statewide for construction projects. Another \$55.3 million in projects were approved but didn’t receive allocations. Stein said those projects likely will get money after the 2014 session of the legislature.

Bentonville was approval for the largest amount among Northwest Arkansas school districts at \$15.4 million for a second high school. However, Bentonville administrators have said the amount the district will receive depends on the size of the building. Some have estimated the district will receive about \$13 million of the \$15.4 million allocation.

Pea Ridge will break ground in late summer on six classrooms at the middle school. Work on six classrooms and a 700-seat auditorium at the high school will start in May 2014, Superintendent Rick Neal said. The projects are expected to cost \$6.5 million. That cost will be covered by a district building fund, refinancing second lien bonds and \$1.1 million from the state, Neal said.

Besides Bentonville, new buildings are planned in Farmington, Prairie Grove and West Fork.

Farmington’s high school will be built on a 45-acre tract on the south side of town, adjacent to the Farmington Methodist Church on South Hunter Street. The 74,000-square-foot building will include an 1,800-seat sports arena, a 600-seat auditorium, stage and dressing rooms, plus rooms for band, choir and drama. The state money will help pay for the fine arts space of the project.

Prairie Grove was allocated about \$1.4 million. Most is for a primary school attached to the intermediate building and about \$460,000 is for a physical education building and storm shelter built to Federal Emergency Management Agency standards.

Superintendent Allen Williams said the district asked for a review of the money allocated for the projects to make sure a separate grant from the Federal Emergency Management Agency didn't alter the amount the district received. Williams said the facilities division hasn't responded to the request.

The Prairie Grove School Board will decide at its June 11 meeting whether to seek additional millage for the new school.

Meanwhile the district can move ahead with construction of the shelter, Williams said. The district received a \$937,000 grant from the federal agency, which represents about 75 percent of the estimated \$1.25 million price tag. The facility will be about 6,000 square feet, sufficient size to accommodate the students and faculty on the primary and intermediate school campus.

Prairie Grove is the third school district in Northwest Arkansas to build a storm shelter on its campus. Greenland and Pea Ridge have shelters.

Rogers may appeal its two projects that were considered. One, for a new elementary school in 2016 or 2017, was approved but didn't receive money, said David Cauldwell, district business manager. The other was an addition to The Annex building where the New Technology High School will be housed when it opens in August. That project wasn't approved.

Cauldwell said the Facilities Commission found the high school programs didn't need additional space but district projections indicate there isn't enough space.

Besides Rogers, projects in Decatur and Huntsville are on hold until more money becomes available.

The List

Building Projects

Northwest Arkansas schools will receive about \$23.8 million in state aid this year for construction this year.

Benton County

- Bentonville: New high school, \$15.4 million
- Pea Ridge: Middle school classrooms, \$231,420; high school classrooms \$880,671
- Siloam Springs: Southside Elementary School, roof, \$186,376

Washington County

- Farmington: High school, roof, \$148,450; New drama, choir, band auditorium complex, \$1.9 million
- Greenland: High school, structural repair, \$49,508

- Lincoln: Middle school, structural repair, \$773,253
- Prairie Grove: New primary School, \$957,344; FEMA Safe Room, \$462,056
- Springdale: Walker Elementary School, HVAC upgrade, \$861,845; Central Junior High School, roof, \$510,487
- West Fork: Middle school, restrooms, classroom improvements, \$394,420; Middle school physical education facility, \$999,256

Approved Projects Not Receiving State Aid This Year

- Decatur: Elementary school physical education facility, \$267,376
- Huntsville: High school, multipurpose facility, \$233,900
- Rogers: New elementary school, \$2.8 million

Source: Arkansas Division Of Public School Academic Facilities And Transportation

District to add \$5.2 million fiber-optic network (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

The Little Rock School District is taking steps to supercharge access to the Internet at all of its schools - minimizing any drag in service, regardless of how many computers and tablets are in use or how many video conferences are taking place at any one time.

The district, the state's largest with about 25,000 students, recently selected Unite Private Networks of Kansas City, Mo., to provide that new capacity. The company will construct a 65-mile fiber-optic network that will connect a total of 56 sites in the district, which will include all schools plus district offices. The result will be one gigabit of bandwidth per site.

School district leaders and company officials agree that the new fiber-optic, wide-area network will be "hundreds of times faster" than the district's current network, which relies on copper wiring.

The district is dramatically expanding bandwidth to the schools in advance of a new online student testing program that will be required by the state beginning in 2014-15.

The online tests will replace the current Arkansas Benchmark and End-of-Course paper-and-pencil exams and will be based on new national "Common Core" education standards.

Arkansas is part of a 22-state consortium that is developing the new multi-state math and literacy tests, commonly referred to as the PARCC assessments. PARCC stands for the Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College and Careers.

"When it comes time for the online testing required for the Common Core standards, we'll be prepared for it," said Kelsey Bailey, the district's chief financial officer.

"Right now we may have [electronic] bottlenecks at some schools with all the electronic white boards and laptops, iPads and even phones that connect to the network. That can really use up your bandwidth," he said.

The current bandwidth for the schools is six megabits for each elementary school, 12 megabits for each middle school and 45 megabits for the high schools, said John Ruffins, the district director of computer information services. One gigabit is equal to 1,024 megabits. Gigabits and megabits are units of digital information or storage.

"We've been able to get by with our current environment for quite a number of years, but with the changes in the industry, we need a lot more bandwidth at every site," Ruffins said.

The industry changes include the fact that many software applications for schools are now hosted on the Internet and are no longer running on local area networks.

"The determining, driving force" for moving to the district wide fiber-optic network, Ruffins said, was the plan for online testing of students.

Martin Mueller, director of education sales for Unite Private Networks, said the new network will support online testing and other uses.

"The district will be able to run more applications and run them more efficiently and effectively," Mueller said. "When you look at the trends in education today - video streaming, the use of the Common Core standards and digital content, the development of curriculum and the online assessments - the greater bandwidth will allow the Little Rock district to do all of those things more effectively."

The larger bandwidth will allow quicker accessibility to the Internet around the district, Mueller said.

"Everything seems to be Web-based now," Mueller said. "One of the challenges that schools districts face is that they can increase their Internet connection speed, but if they don't have a fast wide-area network that distributes that faster Internet around the district, increasing the Internet speed really doesn't help."

"A slower wide-area network creates a bottleneck for faster Internet," he added.

The greater the number of megabits or gigabits, the better the distribution.

The company has installed fiber-optic networks in Lincoln, Neb., and Dallas public schools. The Dallas network, with 285 connected sites, is the company's largest.

"We serve 200 customers in the central U.S. and the majority of them have gigabit networks," Mueller said. "We are really thrilled to work with the Little Rock School District as our first customer in the state of Arkansas."

Bailey said the company is expected to take about a year to build the network in Little Rock.

That construction entails burying the fiber-optic lines in some cases, and stringing the lines to utility poles in other cases, he said.

Unite Private Networks was the low bidder for improving the district's computer infrastructure, Bailey said. The five-year contract with the company will cost the district \$5.2 million, or \$86,996 a month for 60 months, said Darral Paradis, the district's procurement director.

The district expects to be reimbursed for a percentage of the costs - potentially as much as 90 percent - from the Universal Service Administration Company's E-Rate program.

The Universal Service Administration Company is an independent, not-for-profit corporation created by the Federal Communications Commission to administer programs that assist communities, including school districts and libraries, with the costs for telecommunications services. It uses money collected from international and interstate telecommunication companies.

Reimbursements from the E-Rate program to a school system are based on the percentage of students in a district who are from low-income families, as determined by the student eligibility for free- and reduced-price school meals. About 70 percent of the Little Rock district's enrollment qualifies for federally subsidized school meals.

District leaders last week welcomed the expanded capacity for using the Internet.

"We are really trying to get ahead of the curve before it is too late," Bailey said. "When it is time to test, you don't have time to put in a network and get up to speed. By that time it's too late. We don't want to wait to the last minute, and besides, we need some of the bandwidth right now in our schools."

Bentonville district seeks tax increase (Arkansas Democrat-Gazette)

CENTERTON - The growing Bentonville School District in Northwest Arkansas plans to pursue a millage increase in September to build its second high school.

The School Board unanimously agreed last week the high school should be built on land it owns in Centerton.

The board also considered land it owns on Bright Road in southwest Bentonville.

Centerton's population grew from 2,145 in 2000 to an estimated 10,170 in 2012, according to the U.S. Census Bureau.

The proposed millage rate is not yet known.

Last year voters soundly rejected a 6.7-mill tax increase that included money not only for a new high school, but also operational costs, renovation to Bentonville High School and upgrades to technology and heating and cooling systems in the district.